

2 Corinthians 7: Biblical Reading and Reflections

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 July 2020

Preacher: Alastair Roberts

[0 : 00] 2 Corinthians chapter 7 Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of the Lord.

Make room in your hearts for us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one. I do not say this to condemn you, for I said before that you are in our hearts to die together and to live together.

I am acting with great boldness toward you. I have great pride in you, I am filled with comfort. In all our affliction I am overflowing with joy. For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn, fighting without and fear within.

But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming, but also by the comfort with which he was comforted by you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoice still more.

For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it, for I see that the letter grieved you, though only for a while. As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting.

[1 : 13] For you fell to godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.

For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment. At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter.

So although I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the one who did the wrong, nor for the sake of the one who suffered the wrong, but in order that your earnestness for us might be revealed to you in the sight of God.

Therefore we are comforted. And besides our own comfort, we rejoice still more at the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all. For whatever boasts I made to him about you, I was not put to shame, but just as everything we said to you was true, so also our boasting before Titus has proved true.

And his affection for you is even greater, as he remembers the obedience of you all, how you received him with fear and trembling. I rejoice, because I have complete confidence in you.

[2 : 22] From chapter 6 verse 14 to chapter 7 verse 1, Paul charges the Corinthians to separate themselves from unbelievers, behaving appropriately as the temple of the living God.

The first verse of chapter 7 concludes this exhortation, but draws attention to the fact that our separation from wickedness is chiefly motivated by incredible promises that God has given to us.

He has promised us that he will live with us, walk among us, that he will be our God, and that we will be his people, and that he will be our Father, and we his sons and daughters. In chapter 6 verses 11 to 13, Paul wrote, Now he returned to the same note of appeal.

There should be no obstacle to the Corinthians opening their hearts up to Paul. He hasn't wronged anyone, corrupted anyone, or taken advantage of anyone. His point is not to condemn or shame them in his defence of himself.

He reiterates his deep devotion to and affection for them. His love for them will endure through both life and death. Their destinies are intertwined. Paul is speaking far more directly here than he has done in the earlier chapters, in unburdening himself to the Corinthians.

[3 : 44] Earlier, in chapter 2 verses 1 to 3, Paul had written, For I made up my mind not to make another painful visit to you, for if I cause you pain, who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have pained?

And I wrote as I did, so that when I came I might not suffer pain from those who should have made me rejoice, for I felt sure of all of you, that my joy would be the joy of you all.

Paul's desire had been to be caused to rejoice by the Corinthians, and it appears that this had occurred. Although his relationship with them had been painful for a time, he now had been reassured by them and delights in them, finding them to be a source of joy in his affliction.

His boldness in speech with them is occasioned by his confidence that they will receive it appropriately. By openly expressing his pride and confidence in them, he presents a further foundation for his forthrightness of speech with them.

It is because of his high regard for them that he feels able to speak as directly as he does to them. Paul returns to matters he discussed earlier on in the letter.

[4 : 47] In chapter 2 verses 12 to 13, Paul had spoken of the distress that he had felt when Titus wasn't at Troas. When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was open for me and the Lord, my spirit was not at rest, because I did not find my brother Titus there.

So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia. Paul's anguish was most likely occasioned by the fact that Titus was the one who was to bring him word of the Corinthians. In Titus' absence, he was in painful suspense about how the Corinthians felt towards him and how they had received his painful correspondence.

However, when Titus finally arrived, the news that he brought of the Corinthians was a cause of great comfort to Paul as he communicated the feelings of the Corinthians to Paul. In the comfort brought by Titus, Paul seized the hand of God.

At the beginning of the letter, he had spoken of the way that God brings comfort to his people. In Titus' return, Paul experiences God's consolation. At this point, we start to get a sense of the matter that had caused the pained relations between Paul and the Corinthians.

The Corinthians had felt wounded by Paul's letter. It seems most likely that someone in Corinth had acted wrongly towards Paul or perhaps to another member of the missionary party, perhaps Timothy, causing him considerable pain and grief, especially when he feared that the other Corinthians would finally take the side of the one who had wronged him as they had not properly rebuked the man.

[6 : 15] However, their subsequent response had made very clear that they were innocent in the matter and from chapter 2 verses 5 to 8, it seems that the offender himself had also felt appropriate sorrow for his wrong.

The effectiveness of their grief, that it was not merely sterile remorse, but sorrow that was fruitful in repentance, served to manifest the innocence of the Corinthians of the wrong, but also caused Paul joy, as it was evidence of a decisive shift in the relationship that the Corinthians had with him and a warming of affections in a formerly strained relationship.

For the Corinthians, it had borne fruit in a passionate expression of concern to communicate their innocence and their true affections towards Paul. Paul's chief purpose in writing the letter had not been to vindicate or avenge himself, nor had it been driven by a desire to punish or get the Corinthians to discipline the wrongdoer.

[7 : 39] Paul's statements here should not blind us to the less encouraging news that Titus seems to have brought to, for instance, about the Corinthians' feelings about Paul's council visit. However, right now the relief and encouragement are at the forefront of Paul's mind.

Titus himself had been encouraged by and his heart knit to the Corinthians. Paul will soon be sending him back to them to arrange the collection, which he will start to discuss in the following chapter.

A question to consider. What lessons can we learn about the character of Christian ministry from Paul's relationship with the Corinthians?

[REDACTED]